

ARE SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY CITIZENS SAFE?

ORIGIN

After the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, prisoners escaped or just walked away from local jails and prisons during the chaos that ensued. The Grand Jury examined the evacuation plans of locked facilities in San Luis Obispo County.

AUTHORITY

California Penal Code 919 (b) states: “The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of public prisons within the county.” The Grand Jury acknowledges that the Atascadero State Hospital (ASH) does not fall under the definition of ‘public prisons’ as defined by the California Attorney General. The Grand Jury wishes to thank ASH for their voluntary cooperation in the preparation of this report.

METHOD

Members of the grand jury interviewed authorities of the locked facilities, reviewed written evacuation plans and made site visits to the California Men’s Colony (CMC), El Paso de Robles Youth Correctional Authority (CDCR-DJJ, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation - Division of Juvenile Justice), County Juvenile Services Center (JSC), County Jail, and Atascadero State Hospital (ASH). Due to the nature and need for security in each of the locked facilities, the Grand Jury has agreed not to reveal specific emergency plan details.

NARRATIVE

Safety of the citizens is a high priority. Because San Luis Obispo County has potential for earthquakes, fires, mudslides, releases of hazardous materials, a major concern of locked facilities is for the protection of the community residents.

There are disaster plans in effect at all the locked facilities in the county for internal and external emergencies. They include instructions for minor localized emergencies such as a small fire in a specific housing unit, to a disaster such as a major earthquake. Each facility has its own emergency disaster plan. If an emergency occurs in one or more areas of an institution, inmates may be housed in alternate locations within the facility.

The facilities' disaster plans identify the hierarchy of personnel in charge and their specific duties and responsibilities within the institution. Some of the locked facilities have their own police force and fire fighters to maintain safety and order within the facility.

The institutions have back-up generators, hand-held radios for communicating when telephones are down. Necessary food, water, blankets, tents, medications, etc., to last several days to weeks is available for use.

If evacuation is necessary, the facilities have mutual aid agreements with locked institutions throughout the state. Local facilities coordinate with the Office of Emergency Services as part of disaster planning.

During an emergency, staff remains within the institution until relieved by incoming staff. Visitors within the facility will also remain until it is safe to exit. The personnel in charge have authority during crises and will notify staff and visitors of the plans.

CONCLUSION

The Grand Jury recognized the extensive disaster planning that has gone into protecting residents of the county by all of the locked facilities. The Grand Jury is satisfied that plans are in place to protect the citizens of San Luis Obispo County in the event of a disaster.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

This is an informational report. A formal response is not required.